

Old Louisville

PRESERVATION DISTRICT

A Brief History

SOUTHERN EXTENSION

Wealthy citizens of the city began developing Old Louisville during the mid-nineteenth century. Extending the city grid south of Broadway, the new neighborhood became Louisville's first suburb. Aptly called the Southern Extension, the community initially consisted of a few country residences occupied by Louisville's business and political leaders. More families began to build homes in the area after the extension of north-south avenues in 1850.

Development slowed with the onset of the Civil War, but quickened its pace in the post-war years as the economy boomed. Louisville's growth as a manufacturing center created a rising professional and managerial class in search of upscale housing. Within the next twenty years, many of these families built substantial two- and three-story brick houses along the streets between Broadway and Ormsby Avenue.

RURAL AREA ANNEXED

As development moved southward, so did the city's boundaries. In 1868, the city annexed the land encompassing the House of Refuge, now the Belknap Campus of the University of Louisville. At that time, the House of Refuge stood in a rural landscape on the periphery of existing neighborhoods. Much of the surrounding area remained rural for the next decade, until the period of growth inspired by the Southern Exposition.

EXPOSITION FEVER

Between 1883-1887, one million people visited the Southern Exposition, an industrial and mercantile show located within Old Louisville. Opened by President Chester A. Arthur and featuring Thomas Edison's light bulb, the Exposition brought national attention to Louisville. For local residents, it also sparked great interest in the surrounding neighborhood.

At the close of the Exposition, developers bought and subdivided the 45-acre site. For the next two decades, houses were built with increasing frequency along Third and Fourth Streets, between Park and Lee Streets. St. James Court was begun in 1890.



Italianate mansion and Victorian gardens within what is now Central Park, courtesy of the University of Louisville Photographic Archives.

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Additional subdivisions begun soon after included Belgravia Court, Confederate Place, Fountain Court, Avery Place, Ormsby Place, and Ouerbacker Court. Houses constructed during this period were built of brick and stone in the revival styles popular during the Victorian era.

FALLING OUT OF FAVOR

Old Louisville remained one of the city's most fashionable neighborhoods through the turn of the century. By the beginning of World War I,

however, the once popular neighborhood began to lose favor. Families became enamored of the suburbs developing east and west of the city. First, the electric streetcar and then automobiles made the new suburbs easily accessible. Improved electric, plumbing, and heating technology made the new suburban homes more attractive.

As families moved out, businesses moved into the neighborhood. From the 1920s through the 1950s, commercial development pressure dramatically altered the character of Old Louisville. Businesses destroyed a substantial number of homes to make room for growing building and parking needs. Between 1950 and 1970, the neighborhood lost more

homeowners as families sought new housing in the growing suburbs. The population dropped from 36,000 to 17,900 people.

CITIZENS TAKE ACTION

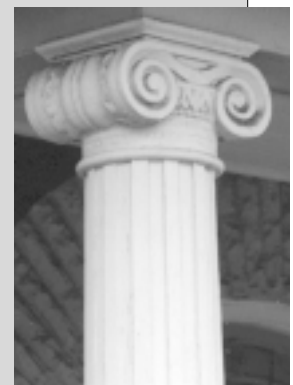
Deeply troubled by the changes that had swept through the neighborhood, residents took action. In 1961, a lawyer and a newspaper reporter formed Restoration, Inc. for the purpose of buying and renovating historic homes in Old Louisville. Not only did the small company renovate eleven homes on Belgravia Court; it also inspired others to do the same. Soon new homeowners had purchased and begun rehabilitating houses in Belgravia and St. James Court.

Five area churches organized the Neighborhood Development Corporation in 1968, sustaining local activism. Homeowners, tenants, and community leaders worked together to rezone the area, prohibit commercial use in residential neighborhoods, and renovate houses. In support of these efforts, the city gave historic Old Louisville official status and protection by designating it a local preservation district in 1974.

Today, the quality of life in Old Louisville is maintained through the efforts of organizations like the Old Louisville Neighborhood Council. Cooperating block associations, the business district's Oak Street Task Force, and the Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission all actively participate in the Council.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Dupont children used the house at 1412 St. James Court as a playhouse until 1905, when the family relocated it to the Court to make way for the creation of Central Park. Built in 1837, it is one of Old Louisville's oldest surviving buildings.
- Gargoyles perch atop the ornate Conrad-Caldwell House at 1402 St. James Court. Designed by prominent local architect Arthur Loomis in the late 1890s and intended for use as the mayoral house, it displays some of the most lavish stone carvings in the city.
- Begun in 1883, the Southern Exposition occupied a 45-acre site near the present location of Central Park. Elaborate frame buildings, stretching across ten acres, housed the Exposition.
- An innovative concept in 1892, Belgravia Court became the city's first pedestrian-only, or walking, court.
- In the 1980s, the Old Louisville Neighborhood Council, Landmarks Commission staff, and a local developer worked together to create an aesthetically pleasing design for the Roadrunner and Family Dollar stores located at Garvin and Oak Streets.



“Reading” Your Building— A Crash Course

Property owners planning to make exterior changes to a historic building should start by identifying the features and materials that give their structure its unique character, as well as its historic and non-historic elements. By taking the time to recognize and understand significant features, you will be much more likely to plan a project that is compatible with the original style of the building.

If, after looking over these guidelines, you would still like more information, the staff will be happy to arrange a pre-application meeting. Staff members can provide additional advice on the character of your building and how it relates to your upcoming project.

Learning to read a building and identify its significant elements is not complicated. Begin by thinking about and answering the questions below.

STEP ONE

Identify the overall visual aspects of a building. Do not focus on the details, but on the setting and architectural context. Begin by working through the checklist below.

SHAPE

What is there about the form or shape of the building that gives the building its identity? Is it short and squat, or tall and narrow?

ROOF AND ROOF FEATURES

How does the roof shape or pitch contribute to the building's character? Are there unique features like weathervanes, cresting, or cupolas?

OPENINGS

What rhythm or pattern does the arrangement of window or door openings create? Are there unusually shaped window openings or distinctive entryways?

PROJECTIONS

Are there parts of the building that are character-defining because they project from the walls of the building like porches, cornices, bay windows, or balconies? Are there turrets, or widely overhanging eaves, projecting pediments, or chimneys?

TRIM AND SECONDARY FEATURES

How does window and door trim contribute to the character of the building? Be sure to consider the decoration, color, or patterning of the trim. What about secondary features like shutters, decorative gables, and railings?



MATERIALS

From a distance, what contribution do the color, texture, and combination of exterior materials make to the overall character of the building?

SETTING

What aspects of the setting are important in establishing the visual character of the site? Think about the building's setback, alignment with adjacent buildings, plantings, fencing, terracing, and outbuildings and its relationship to the street and alley.

STEP TWO

Identify the character of the building at close range. Assess the color and texture of the building materials as they convey the craftsmanship and age that gives the building its unique appearance. Begin by working through the checklist below.

MATERIALS AT CLOSE INSPECTION

Are there one or more materials that have an inherent texture that contribute to the close-range character, such as stucco, exposed aggregate concrete, or brick textured with vertical grooves?

CRAFT DETAILS

Is there high-quality brickwork with narrow mortar joints, or hand-tooled or patterned stonework? Are there hand-split or hand-dressed clapboards or machine-smoothed beveled siding? Craft details, whether handmade or machine-made, contribute to the character of a building because they are manifestations of the time in which the work was done and of the tools and processes that were used.



Courtesy of the University of Louisville Photographic Archives.

OLD LOUISVILLE— A GENTEEL ENCLAVE

After the close of the Southern Exposition in the mid-1880s, developers envisioned its grounds and immediate environs as the next suburban enclave for the affluent professionals of Louisville's Gilded Age.



The Old Louisville Preservation District contains many interesting vistas. The historic alley photograph (top) and present-day park image (bottom) show the range of views.

BUILDING USE

Today, the Old Louisville Preservation District remains predominately residential, although it contains the Oak Street commercial corridor, a focus of revitalization efforts, and a number of other business establishments and civic and religious structures. A mix of single-family residences and condominiums and apartments housed in converted residences and small- and large-scale apartment buildings comprise the majority of the district's building stock.

CIRCULATION PATTERNS

Although historically characterized as suburban, Old Louisville's transportation patterns embrace the regularity of the urban grid. North-south streets alternate with brick-paved alleys, which themselves comprise a notable transportation network, and intersect narrower east-west streets, upon which front houses of a slightly more modest scale. Narrow lot widths preclude any side-yard driveways, and parking is limited to on-street or rear-yard garages and carriage houses. Many architectural gems, reflecting the style and form of the main houses, as well as handyman's-special concrete-block garages, are seen along these alleys.

SITE CHARACTER

Wide sidewalks and tree-planted rights of way are present on many streets, and the district boasts a significant amount of public open space in the form of parks and pedestrian courts and terraces. Most houses have tidy front lawns, which vary considerably in size. Cast concrete or limestone curbing generally edge these lawns, which are usually bisected by steps and a front walk. In some cases, iron fencing survives, delineating the lots. Side yards, in contrast, are consistently narrow, leaving a minimum of space between even some of the most commanding residences. Mature canopy trees, which attest to the age of the neighborhood, also contribute significantly to the district's alternately urban and suburban character.

ARCHITECTURAL EXPERIMENTATION

The district's building stock reflects the eclecticism and experimentation that characterized turn-of-the-century architectural design, interrupted only occasionally by unsympathetic, infill development. Considerable variation among architectural styles and relative opulence can be seen in Old Louisville. The largest houses, usually architect-designed, line the numbered streets within the center of the district. As one moves east and west, the more modest houses that were built in the early twentieth century are seen. Common building styles for mansions included Richardsonian Romanesque, Italian Renaissance Revival, and Colonial Revival. Queen Anne and Craftsman styles were preferred for many smaller frame houses.

BUILDING MATERIALS

Most of the buildings in Old Louisville have a more commanding presence than houses seen in the city's other residential preservation districts. Architects used lavish amounts of ornament. Carved stone, terra cotta, and mosaic tile were used for high-style designs. Textured decorative brick and cut wood trim were used to great effect on less-expensive houses. A walk through the district reveals a wide range of building materials from rusticated limestone to frame, with brick being the most prevalent. Raised stone foundations and a variety of porch types are also regular features.

DIRECTIONAL EMPHASIS

Houses convey a sense of mass and solidity; however, the steeply-pitched roofs and turrets of some styles often provide vertical emphasis. The overall maintenance requirements of these houses are considerable, and significant levels of deterioration arose during the district's era of absentee owners (1930s through the 1970s). Revitalization efforts over the past twenty-five years have attracted a larger number of resident-owners, a trend that will certainly benefit the district's supreme collection of Victorian-era structures.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

Site

- exhibits an urban grid street pattern with a secondary circulation system of alleys;
- has varied lot sizes with generous front and rear yards and narrow side yards; and
- is unified by consistent setbacks, curbing, and street trees.

Facades

- generally share a common setback with other houses on the block;
- are organized in many different manners: symmetrical and asymmetrical, with receding planes or articulated forms and without; and
- often possess a massive and highly-ornamental character.

Masonry

- is the predominate building material within the district;
- often employs a variety of materials used in combination: brick, limestone, and terra cotta; and
- enhances architectural character through its color, texture, dimensionality, and bonding patterns.



Wood

- articulates stylistic features in cornices, eaves, porch elements, and decorative trim; but
- has limited use as a cladding material, except on the eastern side of the district.

Windows

- generally employ double-hung, wood construction, except for some large apartment buildings that have metal casement windows;
- are generally quite expansive, adding considerable visual interest to facades, especially when used in combination; and
- often possess decorative glass or glazing patterns that express stylistic character.

Doors

- are prominent facade elements that convey a building's architectural presence;
- are often set-off by elaborate masonry surrounds or porches; and
- include both single and double varieties.

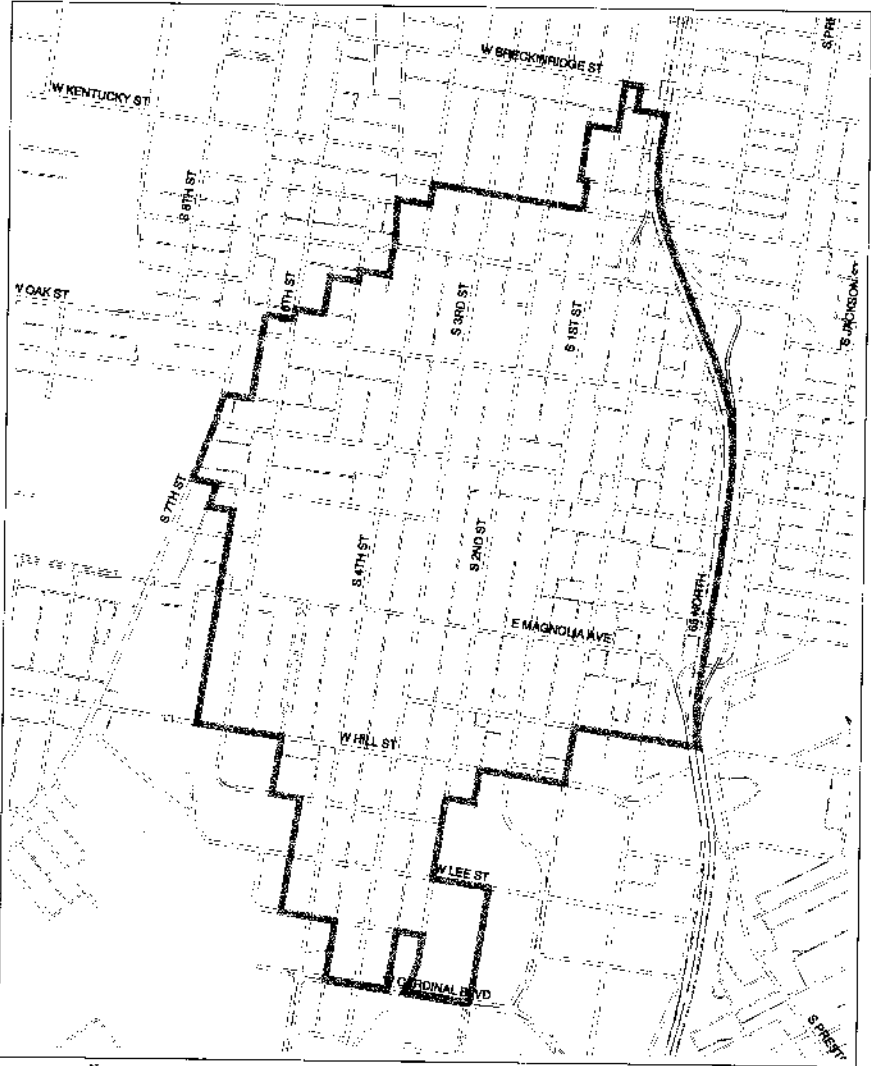
Roofs

- often establish relationships among houses on a given block in their overall form;
- exhibit a wide range of configurations (some complex and some simple); and
- are commonly punctuated by elaborate dormers.

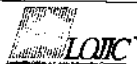
Roof



Door



Old Louisville Preservation District



Site



Porch



FACADE



ALLEY



MASONRY



WINDOW





The Conrad-Caldwell House's side addition is compatible with the main building, because it is recessed from the main facade plane, is subordinate in size, employs similar building materials, and is not visually overwhelming.

Preservation Principles

Outlined below are a number of guiding preservation principles that are modeled after the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Reading through these principles will help you begin to think about how you can carry out your upcoming project in a way that both enhances your historic building or site and preserves its character-defining features.

RELATIONSHIPS

When evaluating the appropriateness of a given project, the structure, the site, and their relationship to the rest of the district should be given careful consideration.

USE

Historic structures within a local preservation district should be used for their originally intended purpose or for an alternate purpose that requires minimal alteration to the building and site.

ALTERATIONS

Repair is always preferred over replacement. When replacement is necessary, materials should replicate or match the visual appearance of the original.

A high level of craftsmanship distinguishes structures within local preservation districts. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques should be preserved whenever possible.

Removal or alteration of historic fabric compromises the original character of a building or site and should be avoided.

Properties, however, do change over time. Those alterations that have become historic in their own right should be maintained as a record of a resource's physical evolution.

NEW CONSTRUCTION AND ADDITIONS

Additions should be designed to minimize impact to historic fabric and should be compatible with the main structure in massing, size, and scale.

New, infill construction should be designed so that it is compatible with its neighbors in size, massing, scale, setback, facade organization, and roof form.

New construction and additions should also draw upon established stylistic elements to create a sympathetic design that is clearly of its own era.

FALSE HISTORICISM

Additions that use new or salvaged material to create a conjectural or falsely historical appearance are inappropriate.

TREATMENTS

Chemical and physical treatments should always be as gentle as possible, since harsh methods like sandblasting can irreversibly damage historic fabric.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Historic sites often contain archeological resources, which should be protected and preserved whenever possible. If artifacts are found, contact the Landmarks Commission for an assessment.